

Item #1- Motorized and Non-motorized Use Levels

Evaluation Objectives: To evaluate motorized and non-motorized recreation use levels to determine if a full range of quality recreation opportunity experiences are being provided.

Methods: Evaluation of recreation use data gathered from the following sources: skier visits, National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM), campground use data, Recreation Facility Analysis master planning, University of Montana Region 1 Needs Assessment for Outfitter and Guides and trails information.

Results and Evaluation:

The forest-wide resource goals outlined in the Forest Plan provide for a range of quality outdoor opportunities within a forest environment that can be developed for visitor use and satisfaction and provide a range of quality recreation opportunities, including motorized and non-motorized, in an undeveloped forest environment.

About 46% of the Flathead National Forest is part of the National Wilderness Preservation System: The Bob Marshall, Great Bear, and Mission Mountains Wildernesses. Roads, timber harvest, and motorized travel are not permitted in these areas. Other designated special management areas are the Flathead Wild and Scenic River, Jewel Basin Hiking Area, and Coram Experimental Forest. The remaining 1.3 million non-wilderness acres may have roads and may be open to timber harvest, and recreation based motorized travel.

The forest offers a wide spectrum of recreation opportunities: to evaluate if we are providing a full-range of motorized and non-motorized recreation use levels and quality recreation opportunity experiences, we reviewed a variety of activities.

National Visitor Use Monitoring:

The National Visitor Use Monitoring Program (NVUM) includes visitor use surveys completed on a 5 year cycle. The program provides information about recreation visitors to national forest system managed lands at the national, regional and forest levels. User surveys were conducted in 2001, 2005, and 2010 on the Flathead National Forest measuring trends in user satisfaction and use levels. NVUM surveys will be conducted on the Flathead again in 2015.

Table 1-1. Total Estimated Visits to the Flathead National Forest by Type

| Visit Type | Calendar Yr 2000 | Fiscal Yr2005 10/2004-9/2005 | Fiscal Yr 2010 10/2006-9/2010 |
|------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Site Visits | 1,600,000 | 1,124,000 | 1,093,000 |
| National Forest Visits | 1,400,000 | 948,100 | 1,078,000 |
| Wilderness | 22,000 | 13,000 | 20,000 |

Revised results National Visitor Use Monitoring Program data FY 2010

Variations in NVUM figures can be partially explained by the NVUM process changing between FY 2000, FY2005, and FY2010. The changes between 2005 and 2010 had to do with how managers estimated use levels for development of the survey calendar and there were a few new sites added to the survey; however, overall the process was similar to previous surveys. Even though the Flathead Forest has had three rounds of survey data, the NVUM numbers cannot be used to display a trend until there has been at least four rounds of surveys completed. NVUM is the best information available and does display the trend within the 5 year cycle. In reviewing the information from the monitoring survey, the data gives a forest-wide picture and does not reflect each individual ranger districts patterns of use.

In the 2010 NVUM survey, the average Flathead National Forest Visitors were 31 percent female and 68 percent male; 98 percent were white and 1.8 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native; 19 percent were under the age of 16, 14 percent were 20-29 years old, 14 percent were 30-39 years old, 19 percent were 40-49 years old, 17 percent were 50-59 year olds, 12 percent were 60-69 year olds, and 2 percent were 70 years and over; the most common zip code was from Kalispell, followed by Whitefish and then Columbia Falls; the average distance traveled to the Forest, 46 percent traveled 0-15 miles, 19 percent traveled 25-50 miles, and 13 percent traveled over 500 miles; the more popular recreation activity that people chose to participate in included viewing natural features 42 percent, viewing wildlife 36 percent, relaxing 34 percent, walking/hiking 34 percent, alpine skiing 30 percent, driving for pleasure 20 percent and hunting 18 percent. Other recreation activities varied from picnicking with 7 percent to OHV use with 2 percent. (Note: participants could choose more than one activity).

The NVUM data continues to shows a drop in Flathead Forest visitors and recreation site visits over all. However, the alpine skiing visitation during a seven year average, continue to increase on the Flathead National Forest. Wilderness visitors also increased from 2005 to 2010.

Winter Recreation

There are two winter sports resorts on the Flathead National Forest under special use permits. These areas contribute a large portion of the recreation use on the forest.

Table 1-2. Skier Days for Whitefish Mountain Resort and Blacktail Mountain Resort

| Year | Whitefish Mountain Resort | Blacktail Mountain | Total Visits Days |
|-------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1998 | 207,592 | na | 207,592 |
| 1999 | 223,013 | 19,061 | 242,074 |
| 2000 | 285,681 | 21,044 | 306,725 |
| 2001 | 254,922 | 27,705 | 282,627 |
| 2002 | 267,731 | 35,715 | 303,446 |
| 2003 | 235,018 | 30,887 | 265,905 |
| 2004 | 258,738 | 31,051 | 289,789 |
| 2005 | 213,409 | 19,191 | 232,600 |
| 2006 | 304,366 | 37,356 | 341,722 |
| 2007 | 260,278 | 40,215 | 300,493 |
| 2008 | 296,708 | 41,657 | 338,365 |
| 2009 | 280,484 | 36,815 | 317,299 |
| 2010 | 282,933 | 34,733 | 317,666 |

The average for the time period of 1999 to 2010 is 274,720 skier days. 2008 was a banner year for the ski resorts with both resorts reporting their all-time high in this timeframe. In years 2009 and 2010, the total skier days dropped but still above the total average skier day.

Trails

The Flathead National forest has approximately 2,246 miles of trails. Table 1-3 shows trail mileage by winter activity. Table 1-4 shows trail mileage in designated wilderness areas totaling 1,152 miles. Table 1-5 below shows trail designations and managed use. Table 1-6 shows motorized, non- motorized, and wilderness trail miles.

Table 1-3. Winter Activity Trail Mileages

| Winter Activity (Non-wilderness Non-motorized) | Miles |
|---|---|
| Groomed cross country ski trail * | 15.5 Blacktail Nordic Ski Area 11.9 Round Meadows Cross Country 14.0 Isaac Walton Cross Country Trail System 6.0 Glacier Wilderness Resort |
| Total | 47.4 |

| Winter Activity | Miles |
|------------------------|--|
| Groomed Snowmobile** | 29 Desert Mountain 26 Skyland Area 43 Swan Lake 6 Holland 45 Stillwater/Canyon Creek |
| Total | 149 |

**Data from Flathead NF Round Meadows and Blacktail Cross Country Ski Area Maps*

***Data from 2010 Flathead Area Groomed Snowmobile Trails Map*

Stillwater, Canyon Creek, Desert Mountain, Swan Lake & Skyland Areas

November 2006, a Record of Decision was signed for the Flathead National Forest Winter Motorized Recreation Plan. There are 787,100 acres of snowmobile opportunities available to the public forest-wide. In addition to the trail mileages listed above, there are additional miles of non-motorized non-wilderness and wilderness trails that provide cross country and backcountry skiing and snowshoeing opportunities.

In 2010, all five districts on the Flathead Forest had completed their Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). These maps show the approved open roads and motorized travel routes for each district. In addition, each district has completed their Over-the-Snow-Vehicle Use Map and will update these two maps as changes occur.

Table 1-4. Wilderness Trail Mileage

| Wilderness Area | Miles* |
|------------------------------|---------------|
| Bob Marshall Wilderness | 781 |
| Great Bear Wilderness | 331 |
| Mission Mountains Wilderness | 40 |
| Wilderness (non-motorized) | 1,152 |

Table 1-5. Trail Designation and Managed Use

| Trail Designation/Management | Miles* | % of total |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Wilderness (non-motorized) | 1,152 | 51% |
| Designed - ATV | 30.5 | 1% |
| Designed - Hiker | 118 | 5% |
| Designed - Pack & Saddle | 1,807 | 80% |
| Designed - Bicycle | 21 | <1% |
| Managed Motorized - single track | 115 | 5% |
| Designed Winter non-motorized | 42.6 | 2% |
| Designed Groomed Snowmobile | 157.6 | 7% |
| Total Trail Miles | 2,246 | 100% |

** Based on 8/5/2011 Infra data base, some changes occurred from last monitoring report due to database updates.*

**Some trails have multi- users i.e. pack/saddle/hiker/bike*

Table 1-5 above illustrates that 51 % of the trails on the Flathead National Forest are located in wilderness. Seven percent of the trails are groomed for snowmobiling with 2% groomed for cross country skiing. Eighteen percent of all trails allow some type of motorized use (Table 1-6), 5 percent of the Flathead trail system managed for summer motorized use, predominantly single track. Eighty percent of the trails are managed or designated for pack and saddle use. In addition to the trail miles open to all terrain vehicles (ATV), opportunities exist on the Tally Lake Ranger District for ATV use on 600 miles of forest roads that receive light vehicle use. One hundred-fifty miles of these roads are open seasonally from 7/1-8/31. The remaining mileage is open year round. ATV opportunities exist on all open National Forest System Roads, if the ATV is street legal and the operator has a state vehicle driver license.

Table 1-6. Miles of Motorized, Non- Motorized and Wilderness Trails

| Trail Type/Designation | Miles of Trail |
|------------------------|----------------|
| Motorized | 416 |
| Non-Motorized | 1,830 |
| Wilderness | 1,152 |
| Non-Wilderness | 1,094 |

*8/5/2011 Infra data base Note: The infrastructure trails data base is in a continual process of being updated.

Recreation Special Use and Outfitter and Guide Permits

Outfitter and guide service play an important role in providing a wide array of recreation activities. They provide visitors seeking assistance, a chance to explore the national forest. The Flathead National Forest has approximately 60 outfitter and guide permits, the number varies slightly each year depending on how many new permits are issued and how many permits expire. The table below shows the current number of outfitters, by 15 activity types, that provide services on the Flathead National Forest. (FY 2008 - FY2010)

Table 1-7. Number of Outfitters by Activity Type on the Flathead National Forest 2008-2010

| Activity Type | Permit/type 2008 | Permit/type 2009 | Permit/type 2010 |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Backpacking | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| Environmental Ed | | 1 | 1 |
| Camping | 9 | 1 | |
| Fishing | 7 | 13 | 12 |
| Hiking | 1 | 9 | 9 |
| Horse/Trail Rides | 6 | 5 | 6 |
| Hunting | 19 | 19 | 19 |
| Livery Service | | | 1 |
| Mountain Biking | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Packing with Alternative Stock | 1 | | 1 |
| Packing with Horses | 14 | 14 | 13 |
| Rafting | 4 | 12 | 10 |
| Short Stop Fees | | | 1 |
| Snowmobiling | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Touring Scenery | 1 | 1 | |
| Total | 68 | 81 | 80 |

Table 1-8. Types of Recreation Special Use Permits for 2010

| Type of Permit | Number |
|-----------------------|--------|
| Shelter | 1 |
| Recreation Residence | 63 |
| Resort | 4 |
| Campground Concession | 1 |
| Park Play | 2 |
| Recreation Event | 6 |

| | |
|---------------------|------------|
| Outfitter and Guide | 80 |
| Ski Areas | 2 |
| Ski Trail Nordic | 1 |
| Total Permits | 160 |

Campground Use

The Flathead Forest had 94 recreation sites identified in the Flathead Forest Recreation Site Inventory completed in 2005. In 2010, there are now 91 developed sites due to changing the site type from developed to disperse site. This was done by monitoring and evaluation the site's resource concern, use level, and recreation trends by forest recreation managers. Currently, Swan Lake District has 18 sites, Spotted Bear District has 12 sites, Hungry Horse District has 35 sites, Glacier View District has 16 sites, and Tally Lake District has 10 sites. Out of the 91 developed sites, there are 31 campgrounds, 19 trailheads, and 11 river access sites. On the Flathead NF, the campground concessionaire manages 9 campgrounds, 5 day-use sites and 5 group campsites. Doris Boat and Campground, a newly renovated site in 2010, was added to the concession package and offers an upgraded facility on the west side of the Hungry Horse Reservoir.

Table 1-9. Percent Occupied for Concessionaire Operated Campgrounds on the Flathead NF

| Campground Name | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Swan Lake | 62% | 74% | 79% | 78% | 55% | 45% |
| Holland Lake | 85% | 93% | 78% | 60% | 49% | 40% |
| Emery Bay | 48% | 63% | 52% | 82% | 47% | 45% |
| Murray Bay | 25% | 36% | 36% | 40% | 42% | 35% |
| Lid Creek | 28% | 37% | 44% | 43% | 43% | 40% |
| Lost Johnny Point and Campground | 47% | 54% | 50% | 51% | 63% | 55% |
| Big Creek | 33% | 40% | 44% | 49% | 50% | 50% |
| Tally Lake | 69% | 75% | 50% | 83% | 60% | 55% |

Percent occupancy is determined for each campground by:

(# of sites are occupied from daily use reports) divided by

(#of sites x # of days campground is open each season)

Data provided by the concessionaire in his annual end-of-year-report.

Rental Cabins

The Flathead National Forest has 12 cabins available for rent through the National Reservation System, with 2-3 possible additional cabins to be added to the near future. These cabins offer a unique recreational experience and a glimpse into rustic life of the Forest Service. Five of the cabins are available year round and are accessible by car. Two cabins are closed during March, April and May and are accessible by car the rest of the year. Two lookout towers are available during the summer season June – October, with one tower accessible by car and the second a requiring a 1 mile hike from the trailhead. The two cabins available during the winter season Dec 1 – March 31 are accessible by hiking, cross county skiing, snowshoeing, or snowmobiling.

Recommended Actions:

Continue updating the Motorized Vehicle Use maps as needed on the Swan Lake, Spotted Bear, Tally Lake, and Glacier View/Hungry Horse Ranger Districts. Complete outfitter needs assessment for the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex and the Flathead National Forest utilizing

the visitor use study conducted in the BMWC. Continue with implementation the new outfitter guide policy. Continue updating the Infra trails and recreation data base as changes occur. Complete the outfitting and guide needs assessment survey at locations outside of wilderness in the fall of 2011.